

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**The It Takes A Village Academy**

**High School 563**

**5800 Tilden Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11203**

**Principal: Marina Vinitskaya**

**Dates of review: May 5 – 6, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Geri Taylor Brown**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The It Takes A Village Academy is a high school with 203 students from grade 9 through grade 10. The school population comprises 87% Black, 7% Hispanic, 2% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 53% English language learners and 3% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 88%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 78% eligibility. The school opened last year.

### Overall Evaluation

#### This school is proficient.

The It Takes A Village Academy (ITAVA) is a place where students and parents believe the principal's mission that "every child will go to college." Using this mantra, the principal has done well in empowering her staff to gather, examine, and utilize a wide range of student data. In the school's second year of existence, staff use student assessment information effectively to influence curriculum writing and as a guide in their selection of instructional interventions. Staff members hold high expectations for this largely immigrant student population. This is having a positive impact on student achievement and behavior.

Informed fiscal and organizational decisions support the school-wide curriculum focus on literacy. The school is systematically collecting and analyzing student data in all subjects. This practice of regularly monitoring student progress is supported by all staff but the school recognizes that these practices require further development to ensure a more consistent use of differentiation throughout the school. There is a positive influence on student success through smaller class size, extended day, and Saturday tutoring. This small learning community serves as a second home for students who feel comfortable and well supported in their school.

The school carries out parental outreach in multiple ways but does not currently have a parent coordinator. In the past, there has been a high level of parent absenteeism at school-wide functions and individual parent-staff conferences and meetings. However, administrators are eager to increase participation at these events with all dates for future activities already announced. Report parental responses have increased dramatically. The school is striving to bring consistency to the offering of differentiated instruction. Some teachers include varied activities in each lesson and group students according to their abilities but not all teachers practice these effective instructional methods. The school has also not yet established the practice of setting measurable learning goals for all students. Additionally, although professional development opportunities are plentiful, there are no direct linkages between improved student learning and improved teacher skills. Teacher development focuses on general instructional skills development.

A multitude of community organizations and colleges has successfully paired with the school offering internship and community service opportunities. Most impressive is the schools' work with Brooklyn College and the National Science Foundation, which takes the students on trips throughout the community to make real life connections to science and the community.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Teachers gather a variety of student data, collaboratively look for trends, and use this information to inform curriculum offerings and instructional interventions.
- All stakeholders hold high expectations of improved student learning and improved behavior that all students eagerly strive to reach.
- The principal is creative in budgetary planning resulting in smaller class sizes and multiple after school and weekend learning opportunities to accelerate learning.
- The school offers a challenging curriculum which is focused on literacy while strengthening student academic knowledge in content areas.
- Strong partnerships with community organizations offer students opportunities to connect their academic growth to their social development.
- The principal leads the school focus to continually improve student achievement as she regularly shares her vision for school growth.

### What the school needs to improve

- Develop effective strategies to improve outreach to parents of all students to increase their participation in school life and deepen their involvement as partners in the education of their children.
- Establish a clear and consistent system of goal setting with ownership by students, teachers and parents to provide them all with a clear understanding of the next learning steps.
- Ensure that all lessons are differentiated and offer challenging and varied tasks to meet the learning needs of all students.
- Personalize professional development for teachers to meet their learning needs and ensure they are directly linked to the academic success of students.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school staff does a good job collecting a wide range of student data from the standard Department of Education sources including online systems such as ATS, HSST, and ARIS. They additionally administer their own testing which ensures the school has a clearer picture of where each student stands academically. Using the Achieve 3000 program, the school establishes a baseline source of data for each entering student. It uses this data in conjunction with English as a second language student grade scores, and special education student individual educational plan information. This provides appropriate class placement and informs classroom group formations. Because of this good practice, there is a high rate of credit accumulation by ninth graders.

The school rightly provides additional support for all students in the form of tutoring. It has attained an English as a second language grant to provide a native language support class for students whose primary language is Spanish, Haitian Creole, French, or Arabic. This class provides a stronger foundation for these students, which is effective in improving their mastery of English.

The school has used various ways to outreach to parents but has not yet seen an increase in parental participation in all school-wide events. A recent trip to a dance company performance rendered 30 parents. Additionally, outreach for parents to collaborate in matters concerning their individual children has also not yet resulted in the expected return. Parents are not sufficiently empowered to work with their child to support them in fully accelerating their learning. The school continues to explore various methods to engage parents. Their interventions show some promise as a higher percentage of parents have already completed the Learning Environment Survey for the current year compared with last year.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

All constituents unmistakably understand the school's climate of high expectations for all students. Placement of ninth grade students in College Now classes clearly reinforces the ultimate school goal of college enrolment for all students. This honor, which many schools normally reserve for upperclassmen, is becoming the embedded practice. Students say that this lets them know that they have to strive for the best and "nothing less".

This caring community is committed to providing its students with the best. The school is moving towards establishing a solid system of setting student academic goals. It has not yet firmly established a system that helps staff, students and parents all understand the measurable goals that students want to attain. While all students clearly see the larger goal of graduation and college attendance, the incremental steps leading to this goal are not consistently clear for students. Seeing and speaking about doing tasks “better” are a more common reference in this arena. Additionally, parents expressed having a good understanding of what subjects their children are learning, but have less clarity about how they can help their children accelerate their learning.

While parent involvement is a concern, a dedicated group of parents works diligently in many aspects of the school life. Most pointedly, these parents serve on the parent teacher association and specifically the school leadership team. The principal has done well in the inclusion of these parents in helping to establish the school goals for the Comprehensive Educational Plan. The principal ensured this group of parents, working along with student representatives and teachers had their voice included in the school goals and in school policy. Parents and students truly appreciated this inclusion and have been empowered to outreach to other parents to get them involved in school matters. One proud parent noted, “We helped get the student government started.” It is the hope of this small group that they will influence other parents to become active.

**Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

The school offers a State aligned curriculum providing each student with a sound foundation in the core subject areas. The principal’s fiscal innovation provides the students with the opportunity to take physical education during the day and a swimming class after school for high school credit. The school also offers students the opportunity to gain credits during the Saturday school academy. These creative offerings have helped to bolster student credit accumulation. Nearly 90% of the school’s current tenth graders obtained eleven credits by the end of ninth grade. This exceeds the required eight credits for promotion to tenth grade.

The students feel “at home” in their school. Their eagerness to learn emanates from their desire and drive to obtain mastery of English. The school accurately grounds the curriculum of each content subject in the theme of literacy across the curriculum. This relevant strategy helps to support the students’ continual improvement in English as they learn and conquer content information as well.

There is some usage of differentiated instruction as teachers implement the strategies of Quality Teaching for English Learners training. However, these showings are sparse, not fully used by all teachers and not yet fully embedded into the instructional culture of the school. Where differentiated instruction takes place it offers students the opportunity to accelerate their learning by providing varied and enriching activities that engage and challenge all students. What is prevalent is the usage of student grouping which effectively promotes student’s collegial work and some student-to-student support for learning.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

This small, growing school has managed to establish some valuable connections with a good variety of community organizations, which supplement and enrich learning experiences for the students. The school works well with Long Island University, the Brooklyn Academy of Music and other groups effectively expanding learning opportunities for students. The connection with Brooklyn College and the National Science Foundation is the beginning of a continual study of environmental factors on the community. The students do research in the fall and complete the project in the spring. Examining the effects of air quality and medical concerns such as hypertension and obesity are amongst the considerations for this evolving work. These "city-as-lab" experiences have effectively increased the students' knowledge of the scientific method of inquiry. Additionally, it has introduced them to the idea of exploring a career in the sciences.

Teachers also have varied learning opportunities in the form of professional development to bolster their instructional skills. The school has provided every teacher with some form of Quality Teaching for English Learners training that has informed their teaching practice. These teachers have begun using varied teaching strategies and they have been empowered to use freely student groupings. The good percentage of students who met the Regents passing scores last June is evidence of the power of these interventions. However, the school has not yet fully individualized professional development so cannot effectively support the alignment of teachers' professional growth with student learning needs. The school has made a promising start in moving in this direction as structures to support this type of development are in place in the form of common planning and faculty meetings where deep discussions about student data take place.

The school's inquiry team has appropriately undertaken the task of examining the student data in math closely. It partially based this selection on the large number of entering students who performed poorly on their eighth grade math exam. The school gathered additional evidence of the urgent need for interventions in this area in January, when it saw a drop in the passing rates on the math Regents exam. The school is currently using strategies for improvement with the targeted students, which include mid-day math tutoring, careful attendance monitoring and educating the whole child. There is also a concerted push for parental involvement via regular conversations with staff about student progress.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The principal has a clear vision focused on improving student achievement as she leads the continuing growth of this recently opened school. She is careful to review student data regularly to keep abreast of possible trends. This thoughtful watching paid off as the school made programming adjustments in the fall and during mid-year to place students who had failed Regents exams in appropriate classes. Additionally, it made an

effective change to the school schedule to include tutoring during the day, as opposed to after school. Students now have a longer day that includes pointed academic intervention to bolster their learning in areas where they are weakest academically. Current class exams and quizzes indicate the success of this strategy.

The school has already planned additional interventions during the sessions for new ninth graders on the LIU campus. It carefully thought through this strategic intervention plan. Its intended impact is on the level of student preparedness for College Now enrollment in the ninth grade. The school hopes that this strategic plan will have a positive impact on student learning and influence their readiness for full College Now enrollment in the fall.

School leaders use teacher conversations at school meetings to promote continuous professional growth for teachers. These forums are forming the basis of the medium for solid work to take place, which the school hopes to formalize individual teacher professional development plans, and develop pointed and measurable student goals.

All stakeholders eagerly look forward to the continued growth of this new school. One parent spoke passionately about his reasons for sending two children to this school. "There is significance in the name. The values of the neighborhood rely on the village, not just the parents." This poignant statement rightly captures the hopes, dreams, and vision that the principal has for the school. She likens her own immigrant experiences in this country to those of her students, and uses both sets of experiences as the anchor to help her keep the school firmly focused on continual improvement.

## School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: The It Takes A Village Academy</b>	△	▶	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>				
	△	▶	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			<b>X</b>	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			<b>X</b>	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			<b>X</b>	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>				
	△	▶	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

### DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.</b>							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	▶	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X				
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X				
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	▶	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher's instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X				
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X				
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X				
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	▶	✓	+			
5.1 the school's plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher's instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X				
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X				
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X				
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	▶	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>